

I want to be clear. Today's objection is *not* about an individual, but our institutions. It is not about Republicans, but our Republic. It is not about Democrats, but our democracy. It is not about an *ELECTION RESULT*, but our *ELECTION SYSTEM - it is broken* and needs fixing.

Today you're hearing the facts about voter irregularities in Ohio. In 2000, we *saw* a similar mess in Florida and other states.

As we try to spread democracy to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, it is prudent, *first*, to look in the mirror; to take a serious look at our own house; and to analyze our own democracy.

What's wrong with our democracy? What's wrong with our voting system? State-after-state, year-after-year, why do we keep on having these problems?

The *fundamental* reason is this: *AMERICANS DON'T HAVE THE EXPLICIT RIGHT TO VOTE IN THEIR CONSTITUTION* !

In 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Bush v. Gore* ruled, "***the INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN has no federal constitutional right to vote for electors for the President of the United States***."

So, at present, voting in the United States is a "state right" not a "citizenship right."

Hence, our voting system is built on the constitutional foundation of "states' rights" - 50 states, 3,067 counties and 13,000 different election jurisdictions, ***ALL SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL***.

Consider this: If you're an ex-felon in Illinois you can register and vote. If you're an ex-felon in eleven states, mostly in the South, you're barred from voting for life. There are nearly 5 million ex-felons who have paid their debt to society but are prohibited from ever voting again - including 1.5 million African American males. But in Maine and Vermont you can vote even if you're *in jail*. Illinois, Florida, Vermont: different states, different rules, different systems.

In contrast, the First Amendment contains ***individual citizenship rights*** that go with you *from state to state* (that is, they are the same wherever you are in the U.S.); and they are protected and enforced by the federal government. You have equal protection under the law by the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government. Therefore, as a result of the First Amendment, every American citizen has an *individual right* to free speech, to freedom of assembly, and to religious freedom, regardless of which state you're in - individual rights that are protected by the federal government. But you don't have such a right when it comes to voting!

A state right is NOT an American citizenship right, but a right defined and protected by each state - and limited to that state .

One-hundred-and-eight of the 119 nations in the world that elect their public officials in some democratic manner have the right to vote in their Constitution - including the Afghan Constitution and the interim document in Iraq. The United States is one of the 11 that don't! Shouldn't we be one of the 108 that do? As the greatest nation with the greatest democracy in the history of the world I think so!

The Bible says if you build a house on *sand*, when it rains, the winds blow and the storms come it will not stand. Our voting system is built on the sand of "states' rights."

That's why every four years when the entire nation is focused on a presidential election, and the rain of politics, the winds of partisanship, and the storms of campaigning come, our democratic house cannot stand the test of voting fairness - and it has come close to collapsing in 2000 and 2004.

As a result the American people are gradually losing confidence in the credibility, fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of our voting system.

So we need to build our democracy and our voting system on a *rock*, the rock of adding a Voting Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that applies to all states and all citizens.

We need to provide the American people with a citizenship right to vote and provide Congress with the authority to craft a *unitary voting system* that guarantees that all votes will be counted in a complete, fair and efficient manner.

It's the only foundation upon which we can build a more perfect Union.

Every two or six years every member of Congress asks the people in their district or state to stand up and vote for *them*. Today it's time that every member of Congress stands up and votes for the people to have the right to vote, and to have their vote fairly and accurately counted.